



Central Texas Master Naturalist Frequently Asked Questions for Trainees

What is a Texas Master Naturalist?

A Texas Master Naturalist is someone who is passionate about the natural world and is eager to share his or her knowledge and experiences with others. It is also someone who volunteers his or her time to the local community by assisting with activities that involve the education, preservation, restoration, and conservation of natural resources.

How do I become a Texas Master Naturalist?

You must complete the Texas Master Naturalist Program consisting of a 40+ hour training course which is held in the spring. The course includes presentations by biologists, geologists, naturalists, and others from local, state, and federal agencies and universities. During the training course, you are considered a Master Naturalist in Training. Once the training course is completed, you are considered a Master Naturalist Pledge.

To become a Certified Master Naturalist, you must complete training and complete a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of advanced training by the end of the calendar year following your training year. For example: if training was completed in June 2020, you have until December 31, 2021 to become a Certified Master Naturalist.

Advanced training enables Texas Master Naturalists to learn additional knowledge or a particular skill in order to assist with different volunteer projects. Advanced training activities may involve hands-on instruction, field trips to local natural areas, and lectures with such topics as: Texas bats, Texas insects, Texas aquatic environments, wildscape development, approved webinars, and trail planning, among many others.

To maintain certification, an additional minimum of 8 hours of advanced training and at least 40 hours of volunteer service are required each year. All of the volunteer and advanced training activities must be approved and hours reported to get credit.

As a Master Naturalist, what would I do?

Volunteer projects run the gamut and might include construction and maintenance of interpretive trails, prairie restorations, exotic species control, fish, wildlife and plant inventories, angler education, natural resource youth camps, school programs, programs to community groups, landowner consultation, outdoor skill instruction, natural resource interpretation at nature centers, creating and maintaining nature scaping demonstration areas, and so much more.

What if I have to miss a Training Class session? How do I make them up?

Trainees are encouraged to review the schedule carefully and make arrangements to attend all classes. If you know of a conflict, please notify your mentor or one of the Training Class Coordinators as soon as possible to arrange a substitute class or makeup class so that your graduation is not delayed. Possibilities include attending an equivalent session at a neighboring chapter, identifying alternate ways of obtaining the training or attending the missed session in the next Training Class.

How do I report my volunteer hours?

Since we are a community service organization sponsored by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and the Texas AgriLife Extension, it is important to keep track and report our volunteer hours. This is important not only to maintain our individual Master Naturalist certification, but also for our chapter to tally the total annual hours served. This information is the basis for funding from grants and other programs which help further our goals as Master Naturalists. Hours are logged in the Volunteer Management System (VMS) each week and then approved by the membership chairperson.

When can I start accumulating hours?

Trainees attending our Training Class can begin accumulating volunteer and advanced training hours (for activities not associated with the basic training courses) immediately after the first class you attend, and your background check has been completed. It is possible for you to become certified (40 volunteer hours and 8 advanced training hours) on the successful completion of the training class.

How often should I report my hours?

It is best to report your hours on a regular basis (at least weekly) so that our tracking of hours is the most accurate. Hours must be reported within 45 days of the volunteer or training event; TPWD will not permit us to enter hours past the 45 day limit.

How do I find out about volunteer and advanced training opportunities?

You will receive news about approved opportunities via email from the Chapter; sign-up lists are available at Chapter Meetings; and opportunities are publicized on the website calendar and our Facebook page. See <http://txmn.org/centraltexas/training/pre-approved-projects/> on our web site for more information.

What if I have an idea or proposal for a volunteer opportunity? What do I do?

If you come up with a project on your own that you'd like to do or find out about one you'd like to get approved, you will need to fill out an online opportunity request form. Each activity must be approved for you to receive credit for that time as a Master Naturalist. Complete an Advanced Training / Volunteer Service Approval Request Form on the CTMN web page under the AT-VS Form tab. Once an item is approved it will be placed on the approved list of activities in VMS and be made available to all TMN-Active and TMN In-Training members.

Where do I find the Chapter's bylaws and policies?

Chapter documents are available on the CTMN website under the Member Resources tab.

Who are the Chapter's officers?

Officers are listed on the CTMN website. Feel free to contact them!

When and where are Chapter Meetings held?

Chapter meetings are the second Tuesday of the month. They are generally held at the Church of Christ, 3003 North Main, Belton 6-8 pm. Meetings begin with light snacks and social time followed by certification and milestone awards. The evening continues with a one-hour program that qualifies for Advanced Training. Then on to updates on volunteer/training opportunities, Chapter business and other happenings. The December meeting is a special end-of-year celebration.

When are Board Meetings held?

Board meetings are first Monday of January, March, May, July, September, and November at the AgriLife Board Room, 1605 N Main, Belton. Board Meetings are open to the membership and you are encouraged to participate. If you are on the agenda, you may count and record that time as volunteer service.

How can I get more involved in the Chapter?

You can become more knowledgeable about our activities by attending Chapter Meetings, familiarizing yourself with our web page, and volunteering for a variety of volunteer/advanced training activities. You will meet more people and, hopefully, identify specific areas of interest. Let others know of your interests and skill sets; ask them how your expertise can best be put to use. You may also serve on committees such as training, meeting host, communications, or others and submit articles and/or photographs for the newsletter. An excellent way to meet more Master Naturalists is to attend the annual Texas Master Naturalist State Conference held on the third weekend in October at various locations in the state.

What are the different membership levels and their requirements?

Master Naturalist in Training: a member that is working to complete their 40+ hours of classroom training.

Master Naturalist Pledge: a member that has completed their training, and paid their dues by March 31st, but have not yet fulfilled the required hours for certification.

Certified Master Naturalist: a member that has completed the initial training, has paid their dues, and completed the required 40 volunteer hours and 8 advanced training hours. This also includes members who have certified one year and are working toward re-certification in subsequent years.

Where can I get a monogrammed CTMN shirt?

1st Place Awards and Gifts in Belton has our logo set up. You can take any shirt (or other item) you like there to be monogrammed for a fee. The unofficial, official chapter shirt is a Port Authority brand Maui blue color which you can order from Unique Creations or other suppliers. There is no requirement to have the Maui blue or any other monogrammed shirt. 1st Place Awards and Gifts, 2304 North Main Street, Belton. Phone: 254-939-2442.

What do the dragonfly and other pins mean?

Once the volunteer has completed all the requirements for certification, they shall receive a State Certificate and color dragonfly pin as a Certified Texas Master Naturalist. Each year, a new re-certification pin is created to be awarded to members who complete the re-certification requirements. The pins feature animals, plants and insects voted on by members across the state.

Milestone Pins

The Texas Master Naturalist Program offers a series of pins commemorating different milestone achievements within the program. The milestone pins honor those volunteers that have given:

250 hours - bronze dragonfly pin

500 hours - brushed silver dragonfly pin

1,000 hours - brushed gold dragonfly pin

2,500 hours - polished [shiny] silver dragonfly

4,000 hours - polished [shiny] gold dragonfly w/ ruby and US Presidential Volunteer Service Award

5,000 hours - polished [shiny] gold dragonfly w/ diamond and letter of achievement from State Program Director

10,000 hours - polished [shiny] gold dragonfly w/ emerald. The recipient also receives a letter of achievement from State Program Director, special recognition at the TMN Annual Meeting, and other recognition through social media.

The State Program may develop other official milestone pins beyond 10,000 hours as needed.

Chapter Milestone Pins

The chapter has developed their own milestone pins to commemorate achievements not recognized by the state program. These milestone pins honor volunteers that have given:

1,500 hours – Carolina Wren

2,000 hours – Barn Owl

3,000 hours – Great Egret

3,500 hours – Whooping Crane

4,500 hours – Bald Eagle